

# Memorandum

**To:** Diversity Office  
**From:** Cortez Williams, Ph.D.  
**Date:** 1/21/2004  
**Re:** Blacks in the Southwest, 1500 – 1899: A Traveling Exhibit  
Some Image Descriptions

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There are some 42 pieces to this exhibit and we may not have space for all of them; therefore, here are descriptions of some of the pieces.

## **People of the Maroon Community**

Maroon communities are known by many names throughout Latin America. In Brazil they are known as Quilombos and Palmares, in Venezuela and Colombia as Cumbes and in Mexico they are known as Maroons. These communities became sanctuaries for runaway slaves. These individuals responded to their slave status by running away to freedom or harboring ideas of conspiracy to revolt. Each of the Maroon communities had very strong leaders, such as Cudgo of Jamaica in 1730, Macandal of Haiti in 1758, Toussaint L'Ouverture of Haiti in 1794, and Yangas of San Lorenzo de Los Negros, Mexico in 1609. Yangas' community was so strong that Spanish officials elected to negotiate with him, rather than attempt to subdue the community.

## **A Spanish Slave Ship**

Many of the crewmembers of Spanish ships were Portuguese Blacks. Spanish slave ships sailing south along the West Coast of Africa had crews that consisted of African, Portuguese and Spanish Blacks. Men of all colors, racial groupings, and nationalities sailed for the Spanish Crown. Black ship captains were numerous among the Spanish fleet. Vicente Yanez Pinzon of the Nina sailed with Columbus and later with Cortes. He sailed from Cuba to Mexico and sailed with Magellan in 1519. Pinzon is one of the more notable Black ship captains. There were many Black Portuguese Captains who sailed for Portugal and Spain. It was not above their sensibilities to transport Black slaves to the Americas with an Asiento Contract. Among the members of these crews were undoubtedly many mulattos, or mixed blooded Blacks.

## **The Encomiendero**

Conquistadors, in the early development of Mexico, were rewarded for their efforts in conquering new lands for the king. The media and historians have romanticized the conquistador. This romantic notion portrays the Encomiendero as a white Spaniard. This notion is not realistic. Many Encomienderos were Black and one Encomiendero was even Irish, O'Reilly.

The Encomienderos received large land grants, which permitted them unrestricted use of the Native Americans on the land. They could demand tribute from the Natives, and they used many natives as slaves in the mines. Because of the abuse of natives, in the late 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> century the Encomienderos were restricted in their use of the Native Americans. This immediately opened the door for the use of African slaves in Mexico.

## **Black U.S. Marshall arresting a white outlaw**

After the Civil War, the United States Government had full control of Indian territories. Marshalls, both Black and white, were hired to enforce the law and to retrieve outlaws from Indian territories. They pursued outlaws from Arkansas to the Southwest. Three well-known Black Marshalls were Willie Kennard, Bass Reeves, and Grant Johnson. The least known was Henry Woods of Silver City, New Mexico. Woods later became Justice of the Peace for Central New Mexico during the 1890s. Woods was also named as delegate to the county Republican Convention in 1892. As a lawman, he may have been the first to appoint a female as his deputy.

## **James P. Beckwourth, A true frontier's man**

Beckwourth, a Black man, was one of the most courageous of the Black fur trappers in the Southwest, of which, there were several. Some say he was an Indian fighter that surpassed the adventures of Kit Carson, Jim Bridger, Davy Crockett, and Daniel Boone. In 1824, the Crow Indians adopted him, and he later became one of their leaders. Men like John C. Fremont and General Kearny knew him. He is better known for his discovery of a pass through the Sierra Nevadas, which is known today as Beckwourth's Pass. He also owned a hotel just outside southern Santa Fe, New Mexico.

## **Sebastian Rodriquez—De Vargas' Drummer**

The position of the drummer was a prestigious position among the colonizers and the military. The drummer, in many cases, was the "town crier" who read the pronouncements and proclamations in the town square. Sebastian Rodriquez was the premier drummer of his time and wanted nothing other than to perform his duties as the governor's drummer. He refused a land grant in order to continue his services as a drummer. During his service as a drummer, he made many proclamations. One of these proclamations started the resettlement of Santa Fe, August 10, 1692, in the town of El Paso Del Rio Norte.

## **John Collins**

John Collins was a Buffalo Soldier who retired in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He distinguished himself as a Buffalo Soldier. The people of Albuquerque felt his impact when

he planted the original trees along Route 66, which ran directly through the city until the opening of Interstate 40. Today, many of those trees are still located along Central Avenue in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

### **Buffalo Soldiers leading wagon train**

The Buffalo Soldiers were comprised of the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Cavalry and 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> Infantry. These units were responsible for escorting wagon trains, stagecoaches, and payroll wagons, protecting settlers, and putting up telegraph lines.

### **Las Trampas, New Mexico**

In 1751, Las Trampas' petitioners began laying the necessary foundation to acquire a land grant. The records indicate that the request was for 1,640 varas of land for a settlement that was to be named "Santo Tomas del Rio de Las Trampas." One hundred fifty-seven varas (about 46,000 acres) of land were deeded to each of the heads of the twelve Black, mulatto, Native American, and Mexican families on July 1, 1751. The settlers at Las Trampas included Melchoir Rodriquez, son of Sebastian Rodriquez, Melchoir's son, Pedro, and daughter Joaquina, wife of Juan Garcia. As part of the Governor's overall defense policy, the grant was awarded as a way to provide a buffer zone between White settlers and Native Americans. A church was erected on the site. It is declared "the most perfectly preserved Spanish Colonial church in the United States today."

### **The Colonizing of Santa Fe**

The Gordejuela Inspection in the Santa Barbara Province of January 8, 1600, was an inspection of the families joining Don Juan de Oñate in Santa Fe. Nine members of this group were Black. One of these individuals was Isabel de Olivera, a free woman of a Black father, Hernando, and an Indian mother, Magdalena. Also, Mateo Laines, a free Negro who testified on Isabel's behalf; Mateo Montero, a mulatto slave with an affidavit of freedom; and Santa Marie, a slave belonging to one of the Spanish officials.